



Youth Helping Youth.



YES!

Founded and run by formerly homeless youth and their allies, the Youth Empowered Society (YES) works to end youth homelessness in Baltimore by (1) providing urgently-needed direct services to youth experiencing homelessness, (2) developing the leadership and employment readiness of youth who have experienced homelessness through training, paid internships, and peer staff positions, and (3) engaging in system-level reform.

YES carries out this work by operating the YES Drop-In Center, a safe, youth-friendly, and accessible space in Baltimore City for youth who are homeless to meet their basic needs and establish supportive relationships that help them make and sustain connections to long-term resources and opportunities.

Additionally, YES develops the leadership and workforce skills of homeless and formerly homeless youth through our peer-to-peer model: providing training, coaching, and employment so youth staff can effectively serve their peers and achieve meaningful, livable-wage employment after their time with YES. YES employs seven homeless and formerly homeless youth (three who serve full-time, and four part-time) and four staff who are allies.

YES also engages in system reform through participating in client consciousness-raising and leadership development, legislative advocacy, and our work with the Baltimore Homeless Youth Initiative (BHYI) and Baltimore's Housing Roundtable.



Youth speaking about their experiences at YES's summer picnic in July.

YES Youth Inspire

During the cold of winter, a young man with disabilities showed up at YES's door a few days after his eighteenth birthday. His adoptive mother had kicked him out and he had no idea where to go. By working with YES, this youth found emergency shelter; obtained his vital documents, food stamps, and Social Security Income; and got on waiting lists for transitional housing programs. Just as importantly, this young man gained confidence and a sense that he had a family at YES. After seven months he became housed, has since completed employment training with the Division of Rehabilitation Services, and has become an incredible advocate for young people experiencing homelessness.

Meeting Critical Needs: YES by the numbers in FY 2014

YES has established itself as a critical resource for homeless young people in Baltimore since opening our doors in 2012. During FY 2014 (July 2013 – June 2014), YES served **213 unique youth through approximately 4,000 contacts**. Based on the most recent estimates available finding that 640 youth in the City are homeless at any given point in time, *YES is serving nearly a third of Baltimore's documented homeless youth population – although we know the true number of homeless youth is much higher than what has been documented.*

HOW YES IS HELPING YOUTH

Last fiscal year, YES established relationships and met the immediate needs of homeless youth by:

- Conducting an individual, in-depth assessment with every single youth participant, and helping 154 clients develop individual Action Plans.
- Conducting at least 759 one-on-one counseling sessions, often including intensive crisis-intervention and harm-reduction support, with 142 youth.
- Coordinating and hosting over 200 meetings between participants and legal, medical or mental health professionals, as well as countless appointments off-site.

Additionally, YES helped participants' access services for long-term stability by:

- Assisting 87% of eligible youth in acquiring identity documents, such as birth certificates, social security cards, and photo IDs, resulting in 87 youth obtaining identification documents.
- Assisting 70% of eligible youth to apply for public benefits, including health insurance. At least 39 of those participants are now receiving benefits, and others' applications are pending.
- Providing housing assistance (help researching and learning about housing options, and completing applications) to 79% of youth participants. During FY 2014, this resulted in YES connecting 37 of our eligible youth to temporary (24) or permanent housing (13).
- Helping 101 youth apply for employment through 355 separate sessions, resulting in 52 different jobs for YES youth.

MAJOR ADVOCACY WINS!

Building on our work last year to help pass and participate in Maryland's first Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY), YES youth and staff worked diligently with community partners to pass two bills in the 2014 MD General Assembly.



YES youth Roxii with Del. Mary Washington

☑ Passed! HB794/SB794 – Maryland's Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Count and Demonstration Project. This project will gather data about the prevalence and characteristics of UHY in six MD regions, including Baltimore City.

☑ Passed! HB482/SB455 – Tuition Exemption for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. This new law expands the college tuition exemption available to foster care youth to include UHY.



YES Valedictorians partnered with the Park School to put on a successful car wash fundraiser

Amazing Youth Leaders: YES Valedictorians

The YES Valedictorians are a great example of how youth flourish thanks to the opportunities YES provides for them to develop leadership skills, build resumes, and get firsthand experience.

Last fall, YES's Activities Coordinator organized a group of youth participants who were passionate about working to develop their leadership and advocacy skills. Self-dubbed the YES Valedictorians, this group has been working toward serving as co-trainers with YES staff as part of YES's upcoming Training, Education, and Advocacy (TEA) arm, in which staff and youth will train community partners and other professionals in best practices in working with homeless youth.

Working with staff, the Valedictorians have already won a contest for social enterprise funding through the University of Baltimore and received a grant from Youth As Resources to help YES to develop TEA.

YES Valedictorians also testified during several hearings before the Maryland legislature, met with legislators, and took their experiences and ideas to the press. They also served as keynote speakers at Homeless Persons Lobby Day in Annapolis, presented about youth homelessness for students at Park School and August Fells Savage High School, and made a documentary about their experiences with homelessness in partnership with students at Loyola University

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttWX38Vua8E>). Stay tuned to see what amazing initiatives they tackle next!

Key YES Accomplishments this Year

- Trained eight new peer staff members whom have had the opportunity serve as volunteers, Youth Interns, Peer Advocates, Peer Case Managers and on the YES Advisory Board.
- Provided peer staff with more than 12 professional development opportunities and trainings, covering topics such as crisis prevention and de-escalation, harm-reduction, trauma-informed care, and more.
- Expanded activity offerings to include weekly men's and women's support and activity groups, and twice weekly tutoring/job readiness mentoring from volunteers.
- Secured a partnership with the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, which has led to monthly presentations at YES about MOED offerings as well as paid internships and summer Youth Works positions for YES clients to work at YES.
- Partnered with Health Care for the Homeless to jointly hire a licensed clinical social worker with expertise on the needs of teens in urban settings. We are proud to report that Dana Stalling joined our team July 28th 2014.
- Partnered with Art with a Heart to offer their "summer jobs program" at YES during the summer of 2014.
- Secured funding from the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention for a Peer Case Manager with a criminal justice focus. Ciera Dunlap (*pictured below*) was hired in March 2014 for this role. In addition to taking on a full case load, she has organized and led Know Your Rights trainings, accompanied youth to court, and started identifying additional needs of youth relating to the criminal justice system.



OUR HISTORY

YES grew out of the work of the BHYI Youth Leaders, a group of youth with experiences of homelessness that formed as an arm of the BHYI. The Youth Leaders identified the need for a comprehensive, one-stop-shop drop-in center for homeless youth staffed by formerly homeless young adults with whom the clients could relate, and they worked to make this vision a reality.



YES's front room.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

(CURTIS)



“Empowerment means to catch that feeling you get when you are unstoppable. Where you in an instant become infinite in ways you’ll never understand until later in life.”

On his first day at YES and becoming a Youth Works Intern at YES

The day I came to YES was actually the day after YES’s first birthday celebration (I remember from all of the decorations). It was also a few days after I became homeless. I was down at the employment center across from Code Blue [shelter] looking for help and the woman I met with asked how long I’d been homeless. “A day,” I said. She said, “I may have something that might help you.” I watched her look through a few folders and then she handed me a flyer to come to YES.

I walked ‘til I found the address and I’ve been coming here ever since. The first people I met were Lara, then Harriet, and then I made it to the back of YES and met Michael. And I can’t forget about Nyasha! I warmed up to her so quickly that I feel like I’ve found the place where I belong. These people have helped me in ways they probably don’t even know.

I am so grateful to this organization that I am positive that one day I will work here as an actual employee full-time. For now, though, it’s great to serve as a Youth Works intern where I help out with the Art with a Heart Class and other things. I grow each day as a person because of it. I can make a difference here. I’m constantly gaining more experience for future jobs.

On Art with a Heart

Art with a Heart was an amazing experience that changed the way I think about art forever. Everyone there was already a friend. Meeting the teachers was awe-inspiring. As soon as the program ended I already missed the teachers. I miss the people coming in the morning, and writing in the journal and discussing it.

On “Empowerment”

Empowerment means to catch that feeling you get when you are unstoppable. Where you in an instant become infinite in ways you’ll never understand until later in life. Yes, I believe that YES is the very point of empowerment, because I’ve never been put down by YES or its staff. Now that might just be me, but it still feels like family no matter who comes in because that’s YES and its essence. I can honestly say that if it weren’t for YES I wouldn’t be here right now.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

(LEON)

On What YES means to him:

I've been coming to YES for one and a half years, and YES means a whole lot to me. They helped me get housing and also my SSI. Without YES, I wouldn't have any type of income.

I'm lucky that I live two blocks away from the drop-in center. Once you come into the drop-in center, there are no fights or violence. Just real peer staff. They have experienced homelessness and are willing to work with you and help you find services that you will need to get back on your feet.

On Being Part of the YES team thanks to the Youth Works internship:

It is such a blessing to work with Lara Law and the peer staff who got me so far in life. Since coming to YES, I have been volunteering with them to clean up the space and make it safe for youth to get their resources. I feel so, so proud to be working at YES. I can work with other youth and talk about how I was homeless and got out of the shelter. I'm proud to be here to work with other organizations to end youth homelessness.

My experience here makes me think of my favorite quote which is by Kevin Hart. It goes, "the only time you should look back on life is to see how far you have come."

One day, I will be working here and loving all the staff here and every single youth in here. I'm happy and proud that this organization was founded.

On Participating in Art with a Heart:

Art with a Heart is an amazing program for creative youth. I was involved with them and it was a great experience for me. I would do it again and recommend it to others because it is an amazing atmosphere and you are in a great program!!!!

My favorite project was the mosaics. I enjoyed making it. It was so beautiful that you can feel it inside. I'm so excited to sell my art at the art store. It feels good to sell art that you made. Also, half of your purchases go back to the drop-in center. That way we can provide more services to youth. It's important for us to provide more services and change more youths' lives.

*Leon's favorite quote (from Kevin Hart):
"The only time you should look back on life is to see how far you have come."*

YES's Unique Model

YES's success is grounded in the expertise of homeless youth. Thus, the center is staffed by many formerly homeless youth and YES invests heavily in developing the capacities of homeless youth. In order to ensure that every aspect of YES is informed by this perspective, YES developed and practices a consensus model that staff uses for almost all organizational decision making, especially for drop-in procedures and YES policies. Using this process provides an avenue for YES to value the perspectives and experiences of all staff – experience navigating services as a homeless young person; experience as a case manager, social worker, or other professional; and educational experience.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

(EBONY)



The Story of a YES Peer Intern

My name is Ebony. I had no idea that a place like YES existed until one day at school I heard two young ladies talk about the organization. They informed me that YES could help you with housing and any other benefits that I needed. They told me they even offer clothing, hygiene products, food, activities, storage for belongings, activities and conversation.

I wanted to come to the Yes Drop-In Center because I recently had my baby and I needed a place to stay. After I came to YES the first few times, the thing that really kept me coming was that they were all like a family. I felt comfortable and safe whenever I walked into the drop-in center. It was a place where I liked to spend my spare time. The staff also worked really hard to try to find me housing that I could afford. I got on some waitlists but there wasn't too much more we could do until I could raise my income.

Since I enjoy my time at YES, I pursued a job here. I started by volunteering my service faithfully and consistently. Then one day they told me I had an interview. What they didn't know was it was going to be my first job. I was so nervous during my interview that my palms were sweating. They saw that I was nervous and told me I did better than I thought. December 2, 2013 was my start date. The day of my first job and I couldn't believe it.

I am a Peer Intern at the Yes Drop-In Center where I do administrative office work, cleaning, laundry, and get a lot of training. When clients come and talk to me I don't turn them away. I give them my ear to talk to and my shoulder to lean on so I guess you can say I do a little counseling work too.



THANK YOU, YES PARTNERS!!

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